

## Source Sheet Class 5-“2000 Years of Jewish History”-Rabbi Menachem Levine

### Source 1

The members of the two academies [Sura and Pumbedita], led by the two heads [the geonim] as well as by the leaders of the community, assemble in the house of an especially prominent man before the Sabbath on which the installation of the exilarch is to take place. The first homage is paid on Thursday in the synagogue, the event being announced by trumpets and every one sends presents to the exilarch according to his means. The leaders of the community and the wealthy send handsome garments, jewelry, and gold and silver vessels. **On Thursday and Friday the exilarch gives great banquets. On the morning of the Sabbath the nobles of the community call for him and accompany him to the synagogue.** Here a wooden platform covered entirely with costly cloth has been erected, under which a picked choir of sweet-voiced youths well versed in the liturgy has been placed. This choir responds to the leader in prayer, who begins the service with Baruch She-amar.' After the morning prayer the exilarch, who until now has been standing in a covered place, appears; **the whole congregation rises and remains standing until he has taken his place on the platform, and the two geonim, the one from Sura preceding, have taken seats to his right and left, each making an obeisance.**

A costly canopy has been erected over the seat of the exilarch. Then the leader in prayer steps in front of the platform and, in a low voice audible only to those close by, and accompanied by the 'Amen' of the choir, addresses the exilarch with a benediction, prepared long beforehand. **Then the exilarch delivers a sermon on the text of the week or commissions the *gaon* of Sura to do so.** After the discourse the leader in prayer recites the kaddish, and when he reaches the words 'during your life and in your days,' he adds the words 'and during the life of our prince, the exilarch.' After the kaddish he blesses the exilarch, the two heads of the schools, and the several provinces that contribute to the support of the academies, as well as the individuals who have been of especial service in this direction. **Then the Torah is read. When the 'Kohen' and 'Levi' have finished reading, the leader in prayer carries the Torah roll to the exilarch, the whole congregation rising; the exilarch takes the roll in his hands and reads from it while standing. The two heads of the schools also rise, and the *gaon* of Sura recites the targum to the passage read by the exilarch.** When the reading of the Torah is completed, a blessing is pronounced upon the exilarch. **After the 'Musaf' prayer the exilarch leaves the synagogue, and all, singing, accompany him to his house. After that the exilarch rarely goes beyond the gate of his house, where services for the community are held on the Sabbaths and feast days.** When it becomes necessary for him to leave his house, he does so only in a carriage of state, accompanied by a large retinue. **If the exilarch desires to pay his respects to the king, he first asks permission to do so. As he enters the palace the king's servants hasten to meet him, among whom he liberally distributes gold coin, for which provision has been made beforehand. When led before the king his seat is assigned to him. The king then asks what he desires. He begins with carefully prepared words of praise and blessing, reminds the king of the customs of his fathers, gains the favor of the king with appropriate words, and receives written consent to his demands; thereupon, rejoiced, he takes leave of the king."**

Nosson Habavli, 10<sup>th</sup> Century Sage

### Source 2

Most Jewish historians (until the recent revisionist-historians) are convinced that the Byzantine Church would have attempted to eradicate Judaism totally if the Church itself had not been defeated and its plan for hegemony in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean basin thwarted by the rising tide of Islam. Thus the coming of Islam may be seen as a providential occurrence that allowed the Jews to slip between the cracks Islam made in Byzantine Church persecution. However, as is the case in all historic ‘gifts’ in Jewish history, the rise of Islam would prove to be only a mixed blessing for Israel.

Rabbi Berel Wein in *Echoes of Glory* (p. 299)

### Source 3

In Arabia, whole tribes converted to Judaism, including two kinds of the Himyarites. French Bible critic Ernest Renan remarked that ‘only a hair’s breadth prevented all Arabia from becoming Jewish.’

M. Hirsch Goldberg, in the *Jewish Connection* (p. 33)

### Source 4

*Unbelievers are those that say, ‘Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary’ ... Unbelievers are those that say, ‘Allah is one of three.’ There is but one G-d. If they do not desist from so saying, those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished.* (Koran, Sura 5:71-73)

### Source 5

“The intrinsic values of the belief in one G-d, the creator of the world, the G-d of justice and mercy, before whom everyone high and low bears personal responsibility, came to Muhammad — as he never ceased to emphasize — from Israel.”

S.D. Goitein in *Jews and Arabs* (pp. 58-59)

### Source 6

What he [Mohammed] seems to have wished to do was to destroy the polytheistic paganism of the oasis culture by giving the Arabs Jewish ethical monotheism in a language they could understand and in terms adapted to their ways. **He accepted the Jewish G-d and their prophets, the idea of fixed law embodied in scripture — the Koran being an Arabic substitute for the Bible — and the addition of an Oral Law applied in religious courts.**

Christian Historian, Paul Johnson, *History of the Jews* (p. 167)